

THE FAITH OF SIMEON AND ANNA

Luke 2:21-40

Key Verse: 2:30-32

"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

In today's passage, we learn how Jesus was circumcised and presented in the temple. At the time of baby Jesus' presentation, two old persons, Simeon and Anna, appear. We learn from these two old persons exemplary gospel faith. We also learn that Jesus is salvation for all mankind, a light for the Gentiles.

First, Jesus was circumcised (21-24).

Jesus is the Son of God. So his circumcision ceremony should have been extraordinary, more than the crowning ceremony of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), which required 2,000 trumpeters, army parades and dignitaries and royal parties. But there was nothing special about Jesus' circumcision. It was so that he might become our friend and shepherd. This was a divine glory. His parents, according to Jewish custom, circumcised him on the eighth day. Circumcision was the sign of being God's covenant people. When Abram was complacent with Ishmael, a son from his concubine, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless" (Ge 17:1). It meant, "You should not live as an ordinary man. You should live as a chosen people and a man with a covenant with God." Since then, Abram made a big leap of faith. He was no longer Abram, a noble father with no son. He became Abraham, a father of many nations. In the New Testament, circumcision is interpreted as circumcision of the heart. Romans 2:29a says, "No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code." In light of this, we must first circumcise our hearts before presenting ourselves to God. At the time of circumcision, we must make a decision of faith to be a father or mother of many nations instead of an ordinary person.

Human beings are in conflict between becoming extraordinary or being ordinary people. One girl wants to be a medical doctor and then a medical missionary. But she does not want to miss any fun. She is a woman whose heart is not circumcised. God wants us to be circumcised and be his chosen people. Abraham was circumcised as a sign of his change from an ordinary old man into a father of many nations. This is not a matter of option, but it is a divine imperative.

After circumcision, his parents named him Jesus, the name the angel had told them (21). It wasn't easy for Joseph and Mary to name him "Jesus," because Jewish tradition demanded that they name him "Little Joseph," after his father. As we know, the name "Jesus" means "the Savior of the world" (Mt 1:21). It was impossible for them to obey and name him Jesus. But they accepted the angel's message absolutely and named their son Jesus.

Second, Jesus became poor to make us rich (22-24).

Look at verse 22. "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...." Exodus 23:15b says, "No one is to appear before me empty-handed." For the ceremony, Mary had to bring a lamb as a burnt offering. But she could not afford a lamb, so she brought a pair of pigeons instead. It was called, "the offering of the poor." Jesus was born into a poor family. This reminds us of 2 Corinthians 8:9. It says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Before knowing Jesus personally, no one is rich. Money does not make a person rich. Rather, it makes him stingy and selfish. But when we have God in our hearts we become as rich as God. Before conversion, Andrew Carnegie was a demon in selfishness. He made his employees work hard and gave only survival expenses, not proper salaries. He was a rich man. But in reality, he was a very poor man because he did not believe in God. After conversion, Carnegie paid proper salaries to his workers. He also gave away 99% of his income to the church and for social welfare. Still, he was the richest person in this country. We remember seven beautiful woman missionaries who first came to Evanston. They had no regular income. They could not cook for themselves regularly, for they had no money. But they were always ready to serve Northwestern students. They served Northwestern students through

Bible study. They had nothing to treat students with. But miraculously, they could treat them properly. They were poor, but they were very rich in God.

Behind the ceremonies of circumcision and presentation, there was a conviction of faith in parents that their children were not their own, but were the children of God. They circumcised their children as a sign of dedicating their children to God. They taught their children the Law of God. In this incident, we also learn that Jesus became like our brother. Jesus was born of a woman. He was born under the Law and had to undergo circumcision and purification. This was a great humiliation to Jesus, who is the Son of God. But he took upon himself the impurity of his people, so as to save us from our sin and guilt. Hebrews 2:17a says, "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way...."

Third, Simeon, a man of faith and hope (25-28).

To people's eyes, Simeon was no more than an old man who sorrowed over his fate, thinking that he would die soon. As we know well, when the world is dark and evil, the most ominous characteristic of the world is that people do not believe in God. When people do not believe in God, they become fearful and restless. When people do not believe in God, they live according to their feelings and become very immoral and violent. At that time, the world was dark and full of despair. But there was a man called Simeon. What kind of person was he? Look at verse 25. "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Simeon was a warrior of faith. At that time, everybody was sorrowful. But Simeon was not sorrowful, because he had faith in God. What kind of faith did Simeon have? Simeon had faith that God's promises were true. Simeon had faith that he would see the Savior of the world with his own eyes before his death. In that dark world, most people were nihilistic due to the lawless worldly situation. They lived on a day-to-day basis; if they were alright after a day's hard work they sighed deeply, saying, "Today was lucky." No sooner had they said this than they began to worry about tomorrow. But Simeon was different. As Noah wholeheartedly built the ark, working day and night, Simeon studied the Law of God with all his heart. Through Bible study, he heard the word of God. He found the promise of God that he would send the Savior of the world. In Jesus, Simeon found salvation for all mankind; they would be saved from their sins through the Son.

Simeon reminds us of a servant of God, Dr. Samuel Lee. After the Korean War, most people in his homeland were distressed and sorrowful. But Dr. Lee studied the Bible until he saw God's salvation in Jesus for himself and for his people. Through the world mission command of Jesus he found God's hope for Korea to be a missionary-sending country. He planted this hope in college students. Then sorrowful and fatalistic young people began to change into soldiers of Christ for world mission. Many church leaders thought Dr. Lee was crazy and that only rich Americans or Canadians could be missionaries. But Dr. Lee had personal faith in God through deep Bible study. In the course of time, 1,500 Koreans went out as self-supporting lay missionaries to 87 nations of the world.

Nationally speaking, the tragic situation of Israel in those times was simply appalling. Under the Roman rule they were hungry and angry. There was no hope in men's hearts. But there was hope in God. For the previous 1,000 years, so many prophets and devout people had believed God's promise to send the Messiah and they waited for his coming with hope. This hope had sustained their faith. This was Simeon's hope. Verse 25b says, "He was waiting for the consolation of Israel...." Simeon had hope because he had faith in God in his heart. He believed that the Messiah would come soon. When the Messiah came, his people would be consoled for all the sorrows and pains they had endured to live as God's people. In the midst of despair, he believed God's promise that the Messiah would come and comfort and redeem his suffering people.

When Simeon believed in the promise of God in that dark generation, something great happened in his life. The Holy Spirit came upon him and convinced him that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah. Look at verse 26. "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Simeon was old. Because of his absolute faith in God, God blessed his faith and gave him the conviction that he would not die. God also gave him the conviction that he would see the promised Messiah (Lord's Christ). May God give us the conviction that we will not die before seeing America become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Look at verses 27,28. "Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...." He had waited for the coming of the Messiah for a long time. Finally, his long-awaited hope was realized.

Fourth, Jesus is salvation (29-31).

Look at verse 29. "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace." This verse is Simeon's testimony. Simeon was a faithful shepherd of God's sheep all his lifetime. He could not do anything for himself. He could not even die because of God's flock under his care. Simeon had to keep watch over God's flock of sheep, suffering many long, weary nights. Now the promised Messiah had come to save his people. Now Simeon is indeed happy to die. Look at verse 30. "For my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon saw in the baby Jesus salvation for all mankind.

Fifth, Jesus is a light for the Gentiles (32).

This idea is derived from the prophecy of Isaiah (49:6). God chose Israel as his firstborn son, to raise them as a Bible teachers' nation and as a light for the Gentiles. God gave his people a glorious mission. But they did not realize God's deep love for them. They did not obey God's commands. The chosen people Israel did not want to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Most of the Jews thought that the Gentiles were animals. But Simeon thought that the Gentiles were also precious children of God and Jesus was a light for the Gentiles. God revealed to Israel that he wanted to use them as his chosen people in order to save the Gentile people. Yet his people disobeyed. But Jesus obeyed God's will for world salvation. Therefore, Jesus is glory to his people Israel (32b).

Sixth, Jesus is the cause (33-35).

Look at verse 34b. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...." There are many kinds of people with different views of man and the world. But they are all wrong. Despite many ideas concerning human destiny, all men's destiny depends on how they see Jesus. Those who believe in him will be saved. Those who do not believe will be smashed into pieces before being led to eternal condemnation (Lk 20:17,18). Jesus is also a sign that evil men will speak against (34). Look at verse 35b. "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Simeon foresaw the suffering of the baby Jesus' mother. The whole life of Jesus would cause pain to his mother; especially, his death on the cross would cause her pain like that of a sword piercing her soul (Jn 19:25). How costly it was to be the mother of Jesus! May God raise many little mothers of Jesus among young American women.

Seventh, Anna's prayer (36-40).

At that time, men had no proper respect for women. But Luke the historian gave the proper respect and position to women. Among many women there was Anna, who was a prophetess, a daughter of the tribe of Asher, a beloved wife to her husband. One day her husband died. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84 (36,37). When she lost her husband, she could have spent her life as a sorrowful widow. But to her, life was the same, even though her young and handsome husband died. To her, the best way of life was to live in the house of God among God's people, serving them as a mother of prayer. So she made a decision of faith to devote herself to God and to pray for her people. Her prayer topic was the redemption of Jerusalem. She embraced all of God's people with a mother's heart and prayed for them one by one. She was also waiting for the coming of the Messiah. The moment she saw the baby Jesus, she knew he was the Messiah. She thanked God, for the promise of the redemption of Jerusalem had been fulfilled.

We should not despair. Like Simeon and Anna, we must have faith in the promises of God. We must have hope for ourselves and for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.